

3 Way Game Tries

By

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*The following is a convention designed by Dr. Jerry Pottier.
It is excerpted from The Advanced American Bidding System*

We continue with our discussion of 1-bid responder hands by looking at how opener rebids after a single raise. Remember that the raise guarantees primary (4+) card support, so opener's first job is to re-evaluate his hand. Having done so, if the hand is a 1-bid or marginal 2-bid variety (16 to a bad 17) opener just passes, but may balance later to compete if the opponents enter the auction. (Note that the "1-2-3 Stop" preemptive re-raise is not used in this bidding system.) With a 3-bid hand (20+), opener simply bids game in his major. When opener has the good 2-bid or bad 3-bid hand he invites game via the 3-Way Game Try.

The 3-Way Game Try (3WGT) is employed by opener when his MAJOR SUIT opening bid has been raised by responder and his re-evaluated strength is a good 17 to a bad 19, invitational range. A good 17 has at least 3½ quick tricks. A bad 19 has only three quick tricks. (With a good 19 opener simply bids game, which should fetch.) When opener holds the invitational hand, he can use a Short Suit Game Try, a Long Suit Game Try, or a Power Game Try (thus, 3WGT), and responder will know exactly what to do.

The Short Suit Game Try is a type of opener Splinter bid. It begins with opener's cheapest rebid, which forces responder to make his cheapest rebid. (We call this a "puppet" or "relay" bid.) Both of these bids and opener's splinter-showing rebid are alertable. After responder makes the relay, opener shows his useful singleton¹ by bidding it at the three level if the bid is available and it won't take the partnership beyond three of the agreed major. Short suit game tries never show a void. It's easier to show you this than try to write it out, so here's what short suit game tries look like.

1H, P, 2H, P,
2S*, P, 2NT**, P,
3C = Singleton Club
3D = Singleton Diamond
3H = Singleton Spade

* Short Suit Game Try
** Relay (Puppet Bid)

1S, P, 2S, P,
2NT*, P, 3C**, P,
3D = Singleton Diamond
3H = Singleton Heart
3S = Singleton Club

* Short Suit Game Try
** Relay (Puppet Bid)

¹ A useful singleton is any singleton which is neither an ace nor a king. You'll see this again as we cover more types of splinters. We NEVER splinter to show a void or a stiff ace or king.

Responder now accepts by bidding game in the agreed trump suit or signs off. When should responder accept? He accepts when he has a good 7-8 in support, the bulk of it being high card values, and opener's singleton is well-placed so that responder knows none of his values will be wasted.

Long suit game tries are used when opener has a good 5+ card side suit² or when he has a void and two 4-card side suits. Rather than force the relay as above, opener simply bids his long side suit at the three level. With two 4-card side suits opener bids the one in which he needs help. Be careful – if you opened 1H don't rebid 3S unless you wish to show a BIG reverse, a hand which re-evaluates to a 2C opener (23+ points).

Opener	Responder	Auction and Commentary			
AKQ8	96	1H,	P,	2H,	P
AJQ764	10973	3S,	P,	4D ² ,	P
VOID	A432	4H,	P,	5C ³ ,	P
Q82	K42	6H,	all pass.		

¹. Hand now worth a 3C opener. (with only a 4-7 ½ it didn't qualify before, although it was close.)

When you hold a six card suit headed by the AKQ and partner gives you an immediate raise (guarantees 4+ cards in your suit in our system) you can now count your heart as 3 ½ quick tricks. The hand re-evaluates to 5 ½ - 9.

². Cue Bid

³. 2nd Rnd control didn't bid 4 C over 3S, so can't have 1st round control.

How does opener choose between these tries if he holds two 5-card suits and a singleton? Flip a coin? No. If the side suit contains strength (at least 1½ quick tricks), use the long suit game try. If the side suit is weak, show the stiff with a short suit game try.

The last of our 3-Way tries is the Power Game Try. This is used when opener's 17-18 are primarily high card points, including 3½ quick tricks. Opener makes the try by rebidding his suit at the three level. Responder passes with 5 to a bad 7, or bids game with a good 7+, most of which are high card and not distributional values. What's a bad 7? Less than 1 quick trick.

If the enemy interferes with our ability to make our normal response, then our fancy 3-Way Game Tries become a bit more disciplined. Additionally, if opener's Left Hand Opponent (LHO)

² A good 5+ card suit contains 1½ quick tricks.

doubles the opening bid, it impacts the advisability of using the 3WGT. Similarly, if opener's Right Hand Opponent (RHO) bids over responder's support bid, it disciplines the 3WGT. But if opener's RHO doubles responder's support bid, opener may still use the 3-Way Game Try. Are you now thoroughly confused? No problem. Here are some examples of 3-Way Game Tries in competition.³

1. 1H, P, 2H, P, -- 3WGT on
2. 1H, DBL, 2H P, -- 3WGT on, but be careful of the announced trump stack on your left. Now you need an excellent 19, and they had better not be AQ combinations. Your finesses are not going to work.
3. 1H, 1S, 2H, P, -- 3WGT on
4. 1H, 2C, 2H, P, -- 3WGT on
5. 1H, 2D, 2H, P, -- 3WGT on
6. 1H, P, 2H, DBL – 3WGT on, but be careful
7. 1H, P, 2H, 2S, -- 3WGT off
8. 1H, P, 2H, 2NT – 3WGT off
9. 1H, P, 2H, 3x -- 3WGT off
10. Apply the above logic when responder has raised a 1S opening bid.

What happens in the unlikely event that the opponents jump in with a double or a suit bid once we have begun one of our fancy game tries? Let's take a look.

If they double, it is most likely showing either cards or a singleton or void depending on the circumstances.⁴ We proceed as though the double had not occurred, while bearing in mind the warning conveyed by the double. Under special conditions, such as when opener has made a long suit game try, it is doubled, and responder has cards in the suit, a redouble might be in order. 3 clubs redoubled making 3 or 4 might fetch a bit more than 4 hearts, don't you think? And if they pull to a suit, we now have the option of doubling them or returning to our major at the appropriate level. Here are some examples.

1. 1H, P, 2H P,
2S*, DBL**, ?
* Short suit game try
** Spade cards? Minors? Can't be lead directing. You have a right to ask.
2. 1H, P, 2H, P,
2S*, P, 2NT**, DBL***
? Ignore the double, bid your short suit. The double probably shows minors.

³ Be sure to study the Impossible No Trump Splinter by Opener which we'll cover a few pages from now. It's part of game tries in competition.

⁴ A double of a long suit try probably shows a singleton or void. A double of a short suit try probably shows cards.

If they bid a suit, we have the choice of ignoring it and making our normal bid, making an informative pass, or doubling the bid. What do we mean by each of these options?

Well, one of the things we try to do in this system is establish a certain logical pattern and maintain it in as many competitive situations as possible. So, we start by recognizing that we have established trump, we have enough combined values to be in a game try situation, and the enemy has interfered in our auction by bidding a suit. That's a lot of useful information.

One of the tools that we never want to throw away without a very good reason is the penalty double, so we keep it in this situation. Double is penalty. For whatever reason, they bid at the three level when we have a whole lot of strength. It's time to punish them if it's appropriate, and it is often appropriate when they are vulnerable and we are not. For example,

1H, P, 2H, P,
2S, 3C, DBL = "Pard, they are in trouble, I'm loaded in clubs."

1H, P, 2H, P,
2S, P, 2NT, 3D,
DBL = "Pard, I have some good diamonds, what do you want to do?"

A bid carries its normal meaning, as though the interference had not occurred. This is of special value when we are vulnerable and they are not, and we may have a vulnerable game at stake.

So what does pass mean? The best way to use it here is as an informative call. "Partner, they stole my bid and I can't double for penalty in this situation." This will involve partner in the decision. The pass is forcing. Once in a great while this may backfire, but we play frequencies, not freaks. Let's use the examples we've seen before.

1H, P, 2H, P,
2S, 3C, P = "I can't double clubs and my relay is gone." Opener doubles with clubs, otherwise bids 3H inferring a singleton club or a stiff spade with weak clubs.

1H, P, 2H, P,
2S, P, 2NT, 3D,
P = "I have a useful singleton diamond."

1H, P, 2H, P,
3C, 3D, P = "I can't accept your game try and I can't double for penalty. Please double or bid 3H."

1H, P, 2H, P,
3C, 3D, 3H = "Partner, this is our best spot."

The Impossible No Trump Splinter by Opener

This last piece of 3-Way Game Tries in competition is really nifty. You'll see the logic of it applied again when we cover the Impossible Mini Splinter by Responder later in this chapter.

The Impossible No Trump Splinter by Opener is a short suit game try or game force when the enemy has used up all the room. It can be either a 2NT or a 3NT bid depending on the level required. It is used when we have bid and raised a major suit and the enemy has bid and raised the other major suit, thus hogging all the room. Remember that these impossible no trump bids are part of an integrated system of opener game tries in competition.

The 2NT bid says that opener has 17-18 in support with a useful singleton in a minor suit. Responder is asked to bid game if he is on top of his range (8+) but is also warned against doubling an enemy game bid since opener did not use a power game try.

We will now show you some examples of this in action, and contrast it with other possible opener actions in game try situations.

	Opener	Responder	Auction and Commentary
1.	J5	A73	1H, 1S, 2H, 2S,
	AQ1043	J982	2NT -- (Impossible)
	AQ1072	4	Opener is showing 17-18 in support with a
	6	97543	useful singleton in one of the minors.

Let's count opener's hand.

Opener has 12 HCP (don't count the jack of spades). Count 3 points for the doubleton in spades.⁵ Shall we count length points for the long hearts and diamonds? No – only responder does that. (Remember, this is different from counting quick and long suit tricks.) Count the singleton club as 4 points. $12+3+4 = 19$. Not quite enough to force game, especially since seven of our points are for shortness, so opener uses the impossible 2NT game try. Should opener's LHO now further jam the auction with a 3S bid, responder has to guess if opener's singleton is well placed. We recommend that in this situation responder accept the try and bid game unless conditions at the table dictate that caution is in order. Assume for a moment that opener's LHO jammed with 3S and responder passed. If opener now bids 4H responder knows it's competitive and an enemy 4S bid should not be doubled.

	Opener	Responder	Auction and Commentary
2.	J5	A73	1H, 1S, 2H, 2S,
	AQ1043	J982	2NT -- (Impossible, as above)
	A Q1072	4	In subsequent examples we'll show the auction continuing
	8	97543	

⁵ (We have a guaranteed 5-4 trump fit, so we use the 5-4-3 shortness counting scale.)

	Opener	Responder	Auction and Commentary
3.	J5 AQ1043 AQ1072 6	A73 J982 4 97543	1H, 1S, 2H, 2S, 2NT, P, 4H, all pass. Responder's hand is not a <u>good</u> 8-10, but it is 8-10 so he accepts the try.
4.	J5 AQ1043 AQ1072 6	A73 J982 963 Q53	1H, 1S, 2H, 2S, 2NT, P, 3H, all pass. Responder declines the try with this ugly 6. Why 6? Deduct a point for flat shape.
5.	J5 AQ1043 8 AQ1072	A73 J982 1073 K96	1H, 1S, 2H, 2S, 2NT, P, 3C, P, 3D, P, 4H, all pass. Here responder is at the top, but is the club king working? It's sort of an iffy guess, but he has a way to find out. He bids 3C, asking opener to show his singleton. Opener bids 3D to do so. (3H, the agreed trump suit, would have shown a singleton club.) Now responder can bid game with confidence.
6.	J5 AQ1043 AQ972 5	A73 J982 1063 K96	1H, 1S, 2H, 2S, 2NT, P, 3C, P, 3H, P, P, P. Whoops, club king is not working. Stop here.

How does opener show a useful singleton spade and a hand which re-evaluates to 17-18 once responder raised? He must use a long suit game try if appropriate, or a power game try. Here are some examples.

	Opener	Responder	Auction and Commentary
7.	5 AK1043 86 AQ1072	A73 J982 1073 K96	1H, 1S, 2H, 2S, 3C, P, 4H, all pass. Holding the club king, responder wonders why opener made a long suit game try – that try requires a good suit. Ah, opener must have spade shortness too!
8.	5 AKT43 J108 AQ107	A73 J982 532 K96	1H, 1S, 2H, 2S, 3C, P, 4H, all pass. Sometimes opener is stuck and must tell the most attractive lie. In this case it's important to show the spade shortness so he uses the long suit game try.

	Opener	Responder	Auction and Commentary
9.	5 AK1043 K1087 A105	A73 J982 532 K96	1H, 1S, 2H, 2S, 3H, P, 4H, all pass. Again, opener must make a game try with his re-evaluated 18 count. But which try should opener choose? In this case he must use the power try. The diamond suit is too weak to “lie” with a 3D long suit try.

As you may have inferred, an opener without a useful singleton still has long suit and power game tries available to if one of them is appropriate. Here are four examples.

10.	J5 AQ1043 KJ107 A6	A73 J982 4 97543	1H, 1S, 2H, 2S, 3H – power game try Responder should decline.
11.	AKJ103 5 AQ98 652	9872 103 752 KQ97	1S, 2H, 2S, 3H, 3S, all pass.
12.	AKJ103 5 AQ98 652	9872 1032 752 AQ9	1S, 2H, 2S, 3H, 3S, P, 4S, all pass. Try accepted due to having 1½ quick tricks. Yes, the finesses must be on, but you’ll have a lot of company in this contract.
13.	J5 AQ1043 AK1072 6	A73 J982 4 97543	1H, 1S, 2H, 2S, 3D – Why? Why not 2NT? It’s close, but the high quality of the diamond suit takes precedence. Responder should accept.

We are almost finished with this section on game tries during interference. Make sure that you come back to this section after you have read the chapter on doubles, especially the section on Advanced Responsive Doubles, which fills in the missing piece to all of this. Meanwhile, take a look at these extensions which show good 19+ opener hands once a fit has been found. Note how 3NT can be used as an “Impossible” splinter bid, but this time to show shortness in the other major suit. Obviously these are game forcing bids. Why bother? In a competitive auction responder may have a decision to make at the five level. Bid? Pass? Double? Knowing where opener has a singleton could be useful in making such a decision. That’s why opener doesn’t just blast into game.

	Opener	Responder	Auction and Commentary
14.	J5 AQ1043 8 AKJ72	A73 J982 4 97543	1H, 1S, 2H, 2S, 4D – splinter, a good 19+
15.	5 AK1043 KJ1043 A6	A73 J982 4 97543	1H, 1S, 2H, 2S, 3NT... To play? Impossible. We have 9+ hearts, they have 8+ spades. It would be madness to want to play 3NT under such circumstances. Therefore, 3NT here is an extension of the Impossible No Trump Splinter by Opener. This shows a good 19+ and a singleton spade, because the 4C and 4D splinter bids were available and opener didn't use them.
16.	AKQ103 5 AK98 652	9872 103 752 KQ87	1S, 2H, 2S, 3H, 3NT, P, 4S, all pass. Here opener is showing a good 19+ including distributional values and a useful singleton heart.

As we leave this section on game tries, remember that alert rules apply to the sequences we just covered.

About the Authors

Jerry Pottier and Chris Hasney are co-authors of The American Bridge Series of bridge books. Volumes I and II are primarily standard American introductory books. Volume III and the soon to be released Volume IV feature a completely new approach to bidding designed by Jerry. In these Chris was the student and writer, occasionally suggesting improvements which Jerry sometimes even liked!

Jerry is an inactive duty Marine*, as is Chris, who also served in the Army. He managed the Springfield, MA bridge club under his mentor Bill August. Later he became a high tech headhunter, and still later he entered the ministry after getting his MBA and Doctorate in Religious Education. He and his wife Cher now lives in Bisbee, Arizona, where he is pastor of San Jose Baptist Church.

After completing military service Chris entered the financial services industry, retiring due to chronic illness in 1995. During his financial planning career he became a Certified Financial Planner (CFP, now trademarked), and earned a Master of Science degree in Financial Planning. Prior to his retirement he was a Rotarian, serving his club as Director, Treasurer, Secretary and President. He is a Paul Harris Fellow of Rotary International. He also taught courses in financial planning, investment management, and finance at Cochise Community College.

Chris is a contract bridge Life Master, awarded based on performance in American Contract Bridge League club and tournament events. He is a Certified Bridge teacher and director, and a member of the American Bridge Teachers Association (ABTA). He has performed well in numerous national and regional competitions. In addition to co-authoring the American Bridge Series, he is the author of the e-book *Simplicity Bridge*, a new approach to introducing people to our wonderful game.

Currently Chris is concentrating on a new way to interest young people in bridge through the medium of film and video. To that end he has created Bridge Productions. You can see his work at www.youtube.com/7ntxx.

* (There are only three types of Marines: active duty, inactive duty, and dead!)

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